

REMARKS

As an initial matter, Applicants gratefully acknowledge that claims 1-3 have been allowed and that claim 4 contains allowable subject matter (Office Action, dated May 22, 2003, page 4, lines 11-20).

The present claims 1-16 have been amended to remove character references, which has no limiting effect on the scope of the claims. Claim 4 has been additionally amended to depend upon claim 3. Claim 5 has been additionally amended to improve grammar, which has no limiting effect on the scope of this claim. New claim 17 incorporates the subject matter of claims 1 and 5, and is a linking claim linking the inventions of Group I and Group II set forth in the Examiner's restriction requirement (Office Action, dated May 22, 2003, page 2, line 2 to page 3, line 12).

The present amendments to the claims and the drawings add no new matter to the application.

Applicants respectfully traverse the Examiner's restriction requirement set forth in the Office Action dated May 22, 2003, wherein:

Group I: claims 1-4, is drawn to a reforming method, classified in class 423/648.1;

Group II: claims 5-9, is drawn to a reforming apparatus with reforming rooms connected in series, classified in class 422/192; and

Group III: claims 10-16, is drawn to a reforming apparatus with reforming tubes in parallel, classified in class 422/196.

Specifically, new claim 17 is a linking claim linking the inventions of Groups I and II. Linking claim 17 recites a reforming method using "two or more reforming rooms connected in series," which is allowable subject matter (Office Action, dated May 22,

2003, page 4, lines 19-20). Claims 5-9 also recite the allowable subject matter of two or more reforming rooms connected in series, although in a reforming apparatus embodiment of the invention. Therefore, for the reasons of record, claims 5-9 and 17 are allowable.

Because claim 17 should be allowed and is a linking claim, all of the linked inventions (i.e., Groups I and II) should be examined together in accordance with MPEP 809.04. Therefore, the Examiner's restriction requirement is untenable and should be withdrawn. In addition, as claims 5-9 contain allowable subject matter, it would not be an undue burden on the Examiner to consider and allow the subject matter of these claims.

Given that claims 1-9 and 17 are allowable, Applicants point out that the prior art does not teach, or even suggest, a reforming apparatus that comprises "a reforming room...configured by disposing two or more reforming tubes parallel to each other" as recited in claim 10. Applicants believe that it not an undue burden on the Examiner to examine the remaining embodiment and that it would conserve both Applicants' and the Patent Office's resources for the Examiner to do so.

Conclusion

Claims 1-17 are in compliance with 35 U.S.C. 112, and claims 1-9 and 17 are allowable for the reasons of record. The Examiner's restriction requirement is untenable and should be withdrawn because claims 1-9 and 17 contain allowable subject matter and because claim 17 links the subject matter of claims 5-9 to the subject matter of claims 1-4. In view of the above, Applicants believe that claims 10-16 should also be examined to conserve Applicants' and Patent Office resources.

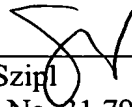
For all of the above reasons, claims 1-17 are in condition for allowance. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration of the instant application and a prompt notice of allowance is earnestly solicited.

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Questions are welcomed by the below-signed attorney for Applicants.

Respectfully submitted,

GRIFFIN & SZIPL, PC



Joerg-Uwe Szimpl
Registration No. 31,799

GRIFFIN & SZIPL, PC
Suite PH-1
2300 Ninth Street, South
Arlington, VA 22204

Telephone: (703) 979-5700
Facsimile: (703) 979-7429
Customer No.: 24203